

Dear Members of the Human Services Committee of Connecticut General Assembly:

My name Laura Palumbo, and I am from Mansfield. I am also part of Uniting for a Safe Inclusive Community (USIC). I believe access to healthcare is an essential human right.

I am writing to express strong support of SB284: AN ACT INCREASING THE AGE FROM EIGHT TO EIGHTEEN YEARS FOR AN INCOME-ELIGIBLE PERSON TO OBTAIN MEDICAL ASSISTANCE REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS. It is critical that access to HUSKY be expanded to include all our Connecticut youth up to age 18 regardless of immigration status. This will take an important step toward ensuring all our immigrant community has access to the healthcare.

This issue is important to me as a parent, citizen, and friend of the immigrant community, but it is personal to me as a someone with a life-threatening illness and someone who has struggled to navigate the healthcare system despite having good health insurance. We all know the frustration of waiting for care—waiting for appointments, bouncing through the system of specialists, and each step waiting several months for an appointment. Even wellness care is riddled with obstacles—being told by your primary care doctor at your annual physical that each additional concern will require a separate appointment, a separate time away from work, a separate payment. Often tests deemed medically necessary by your provider are not covered by insurance, and of course, we all know the well-known affordability issues with prescription medications. I then consider the stress and trauma of not even being able to get a foot in the door or being forced to choose between paying for food or housing and paying for maintenance and emergency life-saving medicine. These are unacceptable circumstances for our Connecticut immigrant community. We have begun to address this with HUSKY coverage for our youngest in the immigrant community. Now we must do more.

I have worked in the field of education for more than 20 years, and during the early portion of my career, in Hartford and New Haven schools, which serve many from our immigrant community. As an educator, I know children need to feel good to learn and to thrive. Regular access to healthcare—for wellness and when illness strikes—is essential for students to be in school regularly and to be successful there. This has perhaps never been more critical than during this time we are recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic. Without question, this need does not diminish when a child reaches age 9, and so it is critical that SB284 take the next steps and build on last year's expansion of access to HUSKY benefits, thereby ensuring that immigrant children will not lose their HUSKY coverage once they age out of the current coverage limits.

The health and vitality of our state rests on the health of our people—all our people. We must not leave our undocumented children and their families behind. Expanding HUSKY access is the right direction on all grounds—moral, ethical, and economic.

I support SB284 and I urge the committee to support and pass this legislation. In future legislation, I urge the committee to complete this work by expanding healthcare access for all immigrants regardless of age and immigration status.

Thank you for your time and consideration,  
Laura Palumbo, Ph.D.  
Mansfield, CT